

JOB INTERVIEW GUIDE



THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS
TEXAS YOUNG LAWYERS ASSOCIATION

GOALS FOR THE INTERVIEW

For You: Securing a job offer and evaluating whether the work and organization aligns with your career objectives.

For Them: Assessing whether you are a good “fit” for their organization, can perform the work expected from you, and have what it takes to succeed.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Research: Research the organization, its history, clients, and recent notable transactions. Understanding the type of work that the organization does for their clients will give you an idea of the type of work you will be required to perform, and the skills you will develop if you secure employment with the organization (i.e. working at a boutique law firm specialized in maritime law may require a different skill set than working at a full-service law firm whose clients are Fortune 500 companies). Use your network (i.e. classmates, alumni, professors) to learn first-hand information about the organization, its reputation, and the people who will be interviewing you. If you know who will be interviewing you, be sure to look for commonalities beforehand that may help you establish common ground with the interviewers (i.e. alma mater, hometown, language). Whereas showing an interest is likely to impress the interviewer; appearing disinterested will likely blow your opportunity at a job offer.

Job Description: Make sure you read and understand the job description. Sometimes the job opening is for a specific practice (i.e. litigation versus transactional) and/or a specific task (i.e. performing research versus preparing patent applications). Understanding the needs of the organization will allow you to focus on those needs and tailor your responses toward demonstrating how you can address those needs. Conversely, not understanding the organizational needs may cause you to appear disinterested during the interview and distort your expectations for the role.

Location: Remember to have (and show) genuine interest in the city where the job is offered. This is critical because employers want to assess your commitment to the city and the community they are located in. If relocation will

be necessary, express your willingness to relocate and be prepared to discuss any ties you have with the city, if any.

Resume: Review your resume before heading into the interview. Interviewers may use your resume as a guide for the interview. You should be able to articulate clearly any prior experience and/or extra-curricular activities on your resume and be ready to describe your role in such activities. If there have been changes to your resume since the interviewers received it (and even if there have not), it is highly recommended to print out a few extra copies of your resume just in case. You should also carry extra copies of your transcript and writing sample. Be prepared to respond to questions about low grades, gaps in your resume, lack of experience, or any other “weaknesses” in your resume.

Practice: Try practicing with someone who has conducted an interview before. Mock interviews will help you gain confidence and avoid pitfalls during the actual interview.

***TIP:** Develop the story you want to tell. Remember, the interview is an opportunity to advocate for yourself, so make sure to highlight the strengths and skills that will leave a lasting impression.

Do: Learn all you can about the organization you will be interviewing with and the interviewers themselves.

Don't: Be late to the interview. Some interviewers may view tardiness as the “kiss of death.”

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Attire: Unless told otherwise, stick to business attire (suit and tie for men, and blazer and dark pants or skirt suit for women).

Opening the Interview: Remember to introduce yourself, use a firm handshake, and greet the interviewer warmly and with a smile.

Non-Verbal Communication: Be conscious of your physical expressions, posture, and other non-verbal communication. Use your body language to show you are engaged in the conversation (i.e. nodding, eye contact).

The Conversation: Listen to the questions and answer them in a clear and effective manner. It is okay to not know the answer to a question. For example, if asked about a

preferred practice area, it is fine to say you do not know (if that's true), and are seeking to explore different areas. If all else fails, try to lead the interviewer into discussing him or herself. After all, the easiest topic to discuss is always oneself.

Ask Questions: Asking thoughtful questions demonstrates your intellectual curiosity and interest in the organization. Questions are also useful in helping you assess whether the workplace culture is a good fit for you. Be prepared with 3–5 substantive questions to ask during the interview. If you are being interviewed by people with varying levels of seniority, try to tailor a question for each to allow you to gain insight from different perspectives.

Closing the Interview: Though the interviewer will determine the length of your interview, be sensitive to indications that the interview is nearing a close. Before ending the interview, take a few seconds to assess whether you have received the answers to your questions. Make sure to thank your interviewers before you exit the interview. It is acceptable to ask about the hiring timeline and when the interviewers expect to make a hiring decision.

***TIP:** Remember that your interviewers are human and are ultimately looking for a colleague they can see themselves working with. The more you talk, the more the interviewer can learn about you.

Do: Adapt your communication style to the interview. For example, if your interviewer is talkative, listen. If in doubt, go with your instinct.

Don't: Ask about compensation and benefits, unless the interviewers raise the topic. Otherwise, wait until after you receive an offer.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Thank You Email: Do not forget to send a thank you email to your interviewers, preferably within 12–24 hours of your interview. Find the time to personalize the email and mention something that you discussed during the interview, such as something new you learned about the organization or the interviewer.

Do: Show appreciation for the interviewer's time, and reference a memorable part of your conversation in the thank you email.

Don't: Wait longer than 48 hours to send a thank you email. By that point, it is possible the interviewer may have submitted his or her interview evaluation.

INTERVIEWS IN OTHER SETTINGS

Sometimes, interviews are conducted outside an office or interview room. Below are tips for interviews in other settings.

Phone Interviews: Prepare for a phone interview in the same way you prepare for an in-person interview. Before the interview, select a quiet location where you will not be interrupted, and ensure you have previously established who will initiate the call. During the interview, it will be especially important to listen fully to each question to avoid talking over the interviewer.

Video Interviews: Before the interview, set up a video account with a professional username and suitable profile picture. Dress as you would for an in-person interview, and arrange to conduct it in a quiet, clutter-free area where you will not be interrupted. Unlike a phone interview, the interviewer can observe your movements and body language, so remain alert and focused throughout the duration of the interview.

Cocktail Parties/Meals: Prepare to demonstrate your social interaction skills at these events. An employer will want to assess your professional presence and gain a sense of how you will present in front of clients and superiors. Do not let your guard down just because you're not sitting in an interview room.

Do: Be prepared with your elevator pitch. You never know when you will need to use it.

Don't: Forget to remain professional at all times; remember you are being evaluated.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Not all interviews are created equal. Neither is there a definitive list of questions every interviewer must ask. Even still, it helps to have an idea of the types of

questions interviewers may pose. Below are some examples:

Personal Questions: Why did you choose law? How would you go about building a trusting relationship with a client? What personalities do you work best/worst with? What is the latest non-legal book you've read? What are your hobbies?

Resume Questions: Why did you leave your prior job(s)? What did you do between undergrad and law school? Have your career goals changed since you started law school? What on your resume shows initiative and creativity?

Law-Related Questions: What did you find most challenging about law school? What qualities do you think a good lawyer possesses? Talk about a complex legal issue you have worked on. Talk about a recent decision you disagreed with and why.

Behavioral Questions: Describe how you manage multiple projects with strict time constraints. Give an example of your time-managing skills. Are you a team player? How would you handle a task that you are completely unfamiliar with?

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